



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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To the north-east side of the house there is, well placed, a winter bed, or a bed whose main constituents are winter plants, a bed with a box border, green and cheerful on the darkest day; the shining evergreen foliage of Hellebores are interspersed with evergreen ribbons of the Hartstongue fern. By February days, *Helleborus niger*, the Christmas rose, will have got its flowering well nigh over, but some blooms will certainly have been left to run to seed, and will be turning from white to green with the central pods rising and growing. Quite apart from the flowers, which are hidden in it, the great bosses of foliage still look handsome. There is here, too, another Hellebore, a native plant, a very graceful evergreen creature, *Helleborus fœtidus*, or Bear's-foot, in common English. The leaves are much smaller and more delicate than those of *Helleborus niger*, though constructed on the same plan, but they rise away from the earth, coming off at intervals from a stem that may reach two feet or more. They vary much in number of lobes, from three or five to seven or nine. The graceful flowers surmount the leaves, reaching their height and fulness in February days. All December they were bosses of paler green among the darker leaves, and when they open they are still green, green flowers just trimmed with an edging of red. They will run to seed after the fashion of the Christmas rose, and then the whole plant will die down, to spring again next autumn. These Hellebores reverse the usual plan of perennials, they are best in winter when they flower, and their leaves, even, are old and shabby in summer. There are other Hellebores worth growing in one's winter bed; there is a tall beauty that blooms in late February and early March, with smaller and greener Christmas roses on long stems, and, alas! I know not its name, for it was given to me by a friend who likewise knew not its name; I have asked one or two plant growers, but without success. I know the owner of a wonderful garden who will never accept a plant from a friend for this very reason—that its name may not be known or rightly known, and yet

even this plan does not eliminate error, for plants do not invariably come from the grower with correct labels; everyone who has bought plants will know this; there are several of my young trees that have grown out of their labelled names entirely.

The bed of Hellebores is by no means restricted to that genus. There is in it a lot of tall growing summer ferns—*Onoclea sensibilis*, a North American, with large handsome fronds that cover and mask the shabbiness of the Hellebores in their worst time. It sends up separate stems of spore cases, that change from green to purplish-brown, enduring and looking well in winter, when the leaves are absent. The trouble of *Onoclea* is that it sends forth wide creeping feet along the surface of the soil, that spread themselves over any other plants that happen to be near, so that one must go over this bed once a year at least to free the rest of its inmates from their obtrusive neighbour.

The Norwegian shuttlecock fern, or ostrich fern, *Struthiopteris germanica*, does well here too, with tall foliage in summer time and a group of even more remarkable spore-bearing fronds in the winter. Yet this is not all the contents of my winter bed, for there is a circle of Hepatica plants, *Anemone hepatica*, blue, white, pink, single and double, which flower gaily in late February and March. They are rather uncertain in the matter of growth, some thrive so much better than others. A single blue one has grown and flourished till it is a dome of flowers, more than a foot in diameter. There is a seedling, one, I think, of its progeny, that is white, and is growing and flowering in the same profuse manner; first a dome of pure white flowers surrounded by a low-lying circle of dark-green leaves. A friend asked me if I had arranged them thus, and scarcely believed in the plant having grown untouched. When the flowers die, a dome of new leaves rises and shelters the seed-growth.

In winters of frequent frosts there is an important occupation that is not to be omitted with impunity. The fingers of the frost deal too strongly with all the smallest plants, with the cuttings, with the recently divided, and with the latest additions of all sorts; they are disturbed, thrown up, and often thrust altogether out of the ground. When the thaw comes the plant-tender must visit all his borders, and with

most deliberate mind and heedful eye, mark out each displaced little being, and with careful fingers fix it firmly in earth again, that the next freezing may not kill, but only, perhaps, displace again. A second going over of my beds where little things abound often reveals some slight damage, unnoticed before! and this inspection is necessary after every succeeding frost. Sentient human fingers do these offices better than any tools, they feel how to press firmly and yet not to crush, as no trowel can. I have a wonderful trowel, the best substitute for a hand I know of, scarce two fingers wide, and yet about as long as two of them—it is an inseparable companion and help; yet I am ever halting between the two methods, using fingers as they have grown to use, and sparing them merely to save trouble and appearances—considerations unworthy of the true gardener. The solution to this difficult problem in dry weather is gloves, but in damp weather, when earth and foliage are wet, there is none.

Francis Parkman, the historian of America, whose life is one of the books of the moment, cultivated a garden as a means of solace and of health, when forbidden by his doctor the use and the writing of books; he extols greatly this pursuit, which he took up, not from choice, but necessity. He calls gardening "a gracious art, which, through all time, has been the companion and symbol of peace; an art joined in closest ties with nature and her helper in the daily miracle by which she works beauty out of foulness and life out of corruption; an art so tranquillizing and so benign, so rich in consolations and pleasures, and one too which appeals to all mankind, and finds votaries among rich and poor, learned and simple alike. Horticulture, broadly pursued, is an education in itself, and no pursuit can surpass it in training the powers of observation and induction. The mind of the true cultivator is always on the alert to detect the working of principles and carry them to their practical application. To read the secrets of nature and aid her in her beneficent functions is his grateful and ennobling task."

SOPHIA ARMITT.

Victoria.

ALL hail, O Queen! O Mother, Empress, Queen,
Mighty in death, most great in sepulture!
Around thy bier stand emperors and kings;
The whole world mourns thy loss in waiting train;
The wind is woful with the bitter wail
Of distant climes linked by thy hands in one.
O great white Mother! nations bear the torch
That lights the stairway to the larger room;
And on the shoulders of the younger world
Is laid thy royal pall. Thy children's children rise
To call thee blessed: peasant, peer, and prince
In common sorrow mourn their common Dead.

All hail, O Queen! Thou art a Queen by right
Of honour, justice, mercy, surely held.
The purple and the ermine still are thine
Where no belittling of narrow minds
Robs majesty of that strange inner robe
Which God respects. A nation's broken heart
Cries thee still Queen; a nation's trembling lips
Falter allegiance to the unstained name,
The dauntless purity of rule and life
Which set an Empire on the adamant
That mocks at time. And thou, O Mother Queen,
Wearing a nation's name upon thy heart,
Holding a nation's heart within thy hand,
Pray for us now: and may the blessed light
Which purges all our prayers of vain desires,
Which dries the tainted drop in sorrow's tears,
And burns the rebel anguish from our souls,
Lighten our hearts: for it is very dark
Without our Mother.

To the idle plough
We turn us back to till an empty field.
Farewell, O Queen! Upon the other side
Thy war-worn sons have hailed thee, crying "Peace";
For parting word thy children too cry "Peace,
Victoria Queen,"—And may God save the King!

MICHAEL FAIRLESS.